

JOINT AREA COMMITTEE - NORTH
28th October 2009

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

The items for information do not form part of the agenda. Should members have questions regarding any of the items please contact the officer shown underneath the relevant report. If, after discussing the item with the officer and it is felt appropriate, a member may request an item to be considered at a future Committee meeting.

- 1. Parish Lengthsman Pilot Scheme**
- 2. Somerset County Council – Council Information Points**

Parish Lengthsman Pilot Scheme (Item for information)

Introduction:

Highway maintenance by Parish Lengthsmen is not a new concept. Many years ago men were given lengths of highway to maintain and were expected to do everything necessary to keep 'their' sections of road up to scratch. Such men became known as lengthsmen and they took great pride in their area.

Unfortunately mechanisation and reducing budgets proved the downfall of the labour intensive lengthsmen. However, in recent years the County Council recognised that, through strategic partnering, an opportunity existed for each partner to bring together distinctive and different strengths and capabilities in order to achieve the following agreed objectives:

- To provide an enhanced and more responsive level of service than the existing arrangements
- To improve the environment within the local communities by adding value to the core services provided by the County Council and District Council
- To increase the satisfaction of the parishioners

The Partnership:

A partnership funded pilot scheme commenced in March 2003 within the geographical area defined by the County Council Coker Electoral Division. Through a formal partnering agreement Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council and seven Parish Councils expressed their commitment to a pilot scheme for a two-year period with formal reviews after each year. It was recognised that the Parish Councils would have key roles in the partnership and in order for the scheme to run smoothly a lead Parish Council was nominated to administer and co-ordinate the scheme on behalf of the other partners.

Duties of the Lead Parish Council:

- Hire of a self employed parish lengthsman.
- Collect contributions from the partners.
- Develop and produce a worksheet for use in the scheme.
- Instigate local publicity of the scheme.
- Receive the weekly or monthly worksheets from the other parishes.
- Programme and schedule the work of the lengthsman scheme.
- Receive the signed weekly or monthly worksheets from the other parishes upon completion of work.
- Maintain records of work ordered/completed to facilitate monitoring and assessment of the scheme.
- Provide feedback and assessment of performance of the scheme.
- Develop a database to record hours worked and costs attributed against each Parish Council and identify the work normally carried out by other partners.

Duties of the other Parish Councils:

Support the lead council in all its duties.

Provide lists of tasks on a worksheet one month in advance to the Lead Parish Council indicating clearly the authority normally responsible for each task.

- Authorise, by a designated person, completed worksheets submitted by the Parish Lengthsman to confirm satisfaction with standard of work carried out.
- Provide feedback to the Lead Parish Council.
- Involvement in the review and monitoring of the trial.

The Parish Lengthsman:

The Parish Lengthsman was hired on a self-employed basis by the Lead Parish Council and was required to provide transport, mobile telephone and small tools necessary to carry out the list of duties given in the Scope of Work below.

Materials required to carry out minor works associated with the County and District Council were provided by the County Council and District Council, e.g. paint for road sign finger arms and cleaning materials for removal of graffiti. Materials for minor works, associated with Parish Council functions, were paid for by the Parish Councils. The Parish Lengthsman was not required to undertake emergency call-outs.

Scope of the Work:

Parish Council Type Functions	South Somerset D.C. Type Functions	Somerset C.C. Type Functions
Examples of work areas covered by the Parish Lengthsman. (Mostly related to maintenance, but new work could be undertaken as appropriate).		
Community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public open spaces ▪ Public rights of way ▪ Play areas ▪ Playing fields ▪ Associated fences, styles etc. ▪ Seats ▪ Bus shelter cleaning and minor repairs ▪ Acting as eyes and ears for the community having regard to vulnerable parishioners and anti social behaviour such as noise, car crime etc. ▪ Reporting 	Environmental: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sweeping ▪ Amenity grass cutting ▪ Litter clearance ▪ Removal of fly-posting ▪ Removal of fly-tipping ▪ Play area maintenance ▪ Public rights of way ▪ Land drainage ▪ Graffiti/unauthorised sign removal ▪ Street name plates cleaning and repair ▪ Removing dog faeces / dog patrolling ▪ Litter bins ▪ Reporting 	Drainage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cleaning existing, Grips/ Outfalls /Easements ▪ Localised ditching ▪ Cleaning gullies/channels ▪ Rodding of pipes Signs (including reflector posts): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cleaning /Painting ▪ Minor repairs Highway Minor Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removal of soil/detritus ▪ Pulling noxious weeds ▪ Cutting of vegetation overhanging the road or pavement ▪ Removing growth from parapets or fences. ▪ Reporting defects

Health and Safety, Training and Public Liability:

The self-employed lengthsman was required to take appropriate responsibility for health and safety and training issues. However, the councils involved in the pilot scheme were required to provide specific health and safety awareness and other training relating to their area of interest including necessary accreditation for the lengthsman to work on the highway, first aid training etc. The lengthsman was required to maintain £5M of public liability insurance.

Funding Arrangements:

The costs of employing a lengthsman would be prohibitive for the individual Parish Councils but, through a partnering arrangement, benefits could be achieved for all. The amount of time spent by the lengthsman in a Parish depended on how much the Parish Council wanted to contribute to the funding arrangements. A small Parish, therefore, could buy in the services of the Parish Lengthsman at the rate of one day a month, equating to approximately £500 per year, whereas the larger Parishes were buying in at the rate of one day a week which was approximately £2000 per year.

The overall funding arrangements for the trial scheme were as follows:

Parish Councils	50%	
South Somerset D.C.	25%	Subject to a maximum contribution of £5,000 per annum
Somerset C.C.	25%	Subject to a maximum contribution of £5,000 per annum

Monitoring the Scheme:

The management, record keeping and monitoring of the Pilot Scheme was carried out by the Lead Parish Administrator on a day-to-day basis and review meetings were held on a six monthly basis during the term of the Pilot Scheme to receive financial reports and updates on progress.

Throughout the Pilot Scheme close liaison was maintained by the Lengthsman with the Highways Area Office to avoid duplication of work and to co-ordinate activities on the highway. This good working relationship brought important benefits to the scheme and in particular generated a planned approach to dealing with maintenance issues on the highway.

Evaluation:

An evaluation of the scheme was carried out at the end of the first year and a final review and evaluation, covering the two-year period, was undertaken in 2005. From an analysis of the records maintained by the Lead Parish Council the time spent by the Parish Lengthsman on works benefiting each of the parties was identified and the results were:

- 28% time undertaking Parish functions.
- 44% time undertaking District functions.
- 28% time undertaking County functions.

The records were also able to provide information on the time spent in each parish, the type of work undertaken and the nominal price per day that the County Council and District Council paid for the Lengthsman's work that benefited that authority.

The analysis therefore showed that whilst the scheme provided good value for money to the County Council, as a high percentage of the work carried out was in the environmental and amenity service areas this meant that the District Council received very good value for money.

Satisfaction Surveys:

Satisfaction surveys of Parishioners were carried out during the two-year pilot scheme and a remarkable level of satisfaction (> 90%) achieved. A survey of the Parish Councils involved in the scheme was also undertaken and some of the comments included:

"The response we get from him to cut back under growth from road signs and footpaths is excellent. Keeping the drains and gullies as clear as possible we have not had any serious flooding problems".

"There have been lots of favourable comments from residents and visitors".

"Very happy with the way the scheme is progressing. More time is spent now on dealing with fly tipping and general litter clearance".

"The work he has done in the playing field on play equipment, gates, paths etc has saved a lot of money".

“Drains, grips etc. are regularly cleared and jobs such as repairs to parish property, removal of graffiti are carried out promptly”.

“Very pleased our list of work is carried out as per our requirements long may it continue”.

Conclusion:

It is clear that the Parish Lengthsman Scheme’s objectives were met in full. The scheme working through a strategic partnering arrangement met local aims and was led by the Parish Councils in line with the government’s approach of re-engaging Parishes in service delivery in their areas.

The success of the Pilot Scheme has encouraged Parish Councils in other County Council Divisions to either start a scheme or explore the opportunities available.

Partners in the Parish Lengthsman Scheme expressed a desire to enter into a longer-term arrangement to enable improved and secured forward financial planning and also show their ongoing commitment to the continuing future success of the scheme. The ‘Cokers Scheme’ is now in its fourth year and continues to be successful

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“Working together for equalities”



RNID typetalk

Joint Area Committee North 28 October 2009

Somerset County Council - Council Information Points (Item for Information)

Lead Officer: Julian Gale, Group Manager (Community Governance, Somerset County Council)
Contact Details: jjgale@somerset.gov.uk or 01823 355025

Purpose of the Report

Funding for County Information Points (CIPs)

In response to members' queries, Julian Gale, Group Manager - Community Governance has provided the following information.

Background

This note provides information in respect of the County Council's decision – confirmed on the 9 March 2009 - to withdraw funding to County Information Points. This decision was taken as part of the Council's 2009/10 budget process and followed a review of the Council's involvement in CIP's.

The reasons behind the withdrawal of funding can be summarised as:

- It was considered that they no longer provided value for money for the level of County Council investment (the report identified that the overall average in respect of County Council enquiries was just 12% of the total with the exception being Porlock (71%)). It was noted that in 2008 West Somerset & Sedgemoor District Councils withdrew their support for those CIPs in their areas.
- It was considered that the relevance of CIPs to the County Council had been overtaken by other access channels that had developed over the time that CIPs had been active – most notably the web and Somerset Direct.
- The need to find significant savings in the Council's 2009/10 budget. In the critical financial climate that SCC found itself in the expenditure on CIPs was no longer considered justifiable by the previous Administration faced with many difficult decisions in relation to protecting front line services.

Currently, the Council is looking to take advantage of the ever developing technology and access channels for customer contact. Work is on-going with TDBC through Southwest One on new telephony / on line access proposals to enhance the customer experience via those routes. In addition work on a customer access strategy for the whole of Somerset is proposed under the Pioneer Somerset programme.

SCC continues to provide a wide range of services in local areas and is appreciative that the District Council is continuing to provide a 'signposting' service for County Council services. This will complement the plethora of direct access / contact points which the County Council has with the public across all district areas - ie highway offices, libraries, schools and other local offices so members of the public have numerous access routes and opportunities to make contact at the local level.
